

quality of the material. For example, plate 5 represent Acala Vidyaraja like manifestation of virtuoso wrath. A carving in plain aromatic cedar in the harmony of art and nature for simple folk. His sculpters were carved on chips and splinters of wood and were known as *koppa batsu* “Chip Buddhas”. In the economy of strokes and a rough and direct style they seem extremely modem. Enku had vowed to make 100,000 sculptures in his life time. It is termed *laksa-puja* or “hundred-thousand prayers”. It took him 28 years to fulfill his vow, and by then he was fifty-nine. On the back of his last sculpture he wrote “one hundred thousand Buddhas completed”. Thus he completed the first part of his worship of the ‘iconic’ which is technically called *sakara*. It had to culminate in the *nirakara* or an-iconic of samadhi. Enku asked a hole to be dug in the ground beside the Nagara River. He sat in it, had it covered thick with earth, and put a bamboo tube to breathe. Fasting, chanting prayers, ringing a bell he remained intoned and passed away. He attained supramundane samadhi of *sunyata*, *animitta* and *nirvana*. Tall oak and cherry trees entwined with wisteria vines stand at the spot. People in the village say that these vines will bleed if anyone cuts them. To cite monk Enku himself:

Each day the mind grows purer  
The moon and the sky and myself  
Round and full.

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## ICONOGRAPHY OF THE FRESCOS OF MINDROLLING STUPA IN DEHRA DUN, INDIA

Mindrolling is one of the six main monastic academies of the Nying-ma or ‘Old Translation’ school of Tibetan Buddhism. The original monastery, with its accompanying great stupa, was founded by the renowned *terton* or ‘treasure revealer’ Terdak Lingpa in 1676, and is situated in the Drachi Valley about forty kilometers to the east of Lhasa. As a consequence of the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1959, many lamas and lineage holders were forced to seek refuge in India, these included a small group of monks who accompanied the throne-holder of Mindrolling, His Holiness

the 11<sup>th</sup> Mindrolling Trichen (1930–2008), and his younger brother who serves as the Khenchen or vinaya-master, His Eminence the 8th Khochhen Rinpoche (born 1937). Mindrolling also holds a female lineage transmitted through the Trichen's daughter, whose present emanation is Jetsunma Tsering Paldron (born 1969).

In 1965 Khochhen Rinpoche began to re-establish Mindrolling in exile on a somewhat barren piece of land in Clement Town at Dehra Dun, in the Himalayan foothills of northwest India. Alongside his small group of monks he managed to build the monk's quarters and a shrine room by 1976, the same year that he invited Mindrolling Trichen to assume leadership of their monastery in exile. Since then Mindrolling has steadily expanded to become one of the largest and most successful Tibetan Buddhist institutes in the world today.

Under the patronage of a generous benefactor, Venerable Ti Ching, the establishment of the Great Stupa began at the end of April 2000, when its foundation was laid down. Then under the expert guidance of Mindrolling Trichen and Khochhen Rinpoche, work actually began on the stupa's construction at the end of December 2000. Amazingly this new Great Stupa was completed within two years, and inaugurated by His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2002, to commemorate the day that the Buddha descended from the heaven of Trayastrimsa. This miraculous event is represented on the stupa's front facade, where a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha is shown descending the three-coloured steps of a stairway made from gold, blue beryl, and white crystal or silver. The golden arch or *torana* on the stupa's dome enshrines a statue of the seated Bodhisattva Maitreya, who is destined to become the future Buddha of the forthcoming era (pl. 6).

At 185 feet tall and 100 feet wide the Great Stupa is believed to be the largest stupa in the world. Standing within a landscaped garden, the beautifully painted walls of its interior are described as bestowing 'liberation upon seeing' upon the beholder. Many painted wall panels or frescos illuminate the stupa's vast interior. These were created by an assembly of around two hundred Tibetan *thangka* painters and their apprenticed assistants, who worked under the meticulous guidance of Mindrolling Trichen, Khonchhen Rinpoche, and a master artist from Dhar-amsala named Sonam Gyurme.

At the request of Khonchhen Rinpoche these magnificent frescos were digitally photographed and archived by Gabriel Berde from New York, who generously volunteered his time between 2008 and 2010. The process of photographing the stupa's ninety-seven large wall paintings required the construction of extensive scaffolding, installation of studio lighting, and the use of high-resolution cameras and computer software. These digital images accurately reproduce the tones and actual scale of

the paintings, and over the last few years I have been working with Gabriel to provide written descriptions of the iconography depicted inside the ground floor shrine of the Great Stupa, which is dedicated to Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche. The exquisite wall paintings of this shrine include:

- Twenty-six frescos that illustrate the Pema Kathang, or ‘Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava’, according to the *terma* revelation of Orgyan Lingpa (1323–1360 (?)). This biography was compiled by Yeshe Tsogyal, and is known as the Kathang Sheldrak, or ‘Crystal Cave Chronicles’.

- Ten frescos that illustrate the lives and legends of the Eighty-four Indian Mahasiddhas, according to the tradition of Abhayadata Sri (Abhayakaragupta).

- Ten gold-on-black frescos that depict many principal Dharmapalas or Protector Deities of the Nyingma tradition, along with their retinues.

Other frescos of this shrine illustrate: Padmasambhava’s Twenty-five Heart Disciples: The Hundred and eight Great Tertons: The ‘Eight Practice Lineages’ of Indian Vajrayana Buddhism transmitted into Tibet: The Guru Tsengye or ‘Guru’s Eight Manifestations’: Padmasambhava’s *terma* of the ‘Seven Chapter Supplications’: The previous incarnations of Terdak Lingpa: The Barchad Lamsel, or ‘Remover of Obstacles on the Path’; and the outer, inner and secret assembly of the Rigdzin Thugthig, or ‘Heart Essence of the Knowledge Holders’.

However, it is the first three groups of frescos that I wish to concentrate upon in this presentation, as the iconographic innovations that permeate these contemporary wall paintings reveal much that borders on artistic genius. This is particularly true of the twenty-six frescos of the Pema Kathang, which are as graphic in their narrative depictions as modern Japanese Manga or Anime illustrations. An abridged description in Tibetan text appears in the background of most of the individual stories of this biography of Padmasambhava. The full version of the biography is divided into a hundred and eight chapters, which are represented by red plaques in the trefoil shape of a Tibetan reliquary box (*Tib. gau*).

## **The Subjugation of Rudra**

The upper half of the second Pema Kathang fresco illustrates the legend of the subjugation of Rudra (pl. 7). At first he is an egotistical monk named Tharpa Nagpo, meaning ‘Black Liberation’, who arrogantly rejects the wise advice of both his teacher and his own servant. After descending into depravity, violence and the black arts, Tharpa Nagpo is then sequentially reborn for five hundred lifetimes as: a black jackal, a wild dog, a mongoose, a flesh-eating beetle, a vulture, a bee with a poisonous sting,

and an 'eater of vomit'. The five groups of creatures and vomit-eating dogs that are represent these five hundred cycles of incarnation.

Tharpa Nagpo then endures numerous rebirths as a flesh-eating ogre and a pus-eating ghost, before his consciousness descends in demonic form from the ethereal realms above Mount Meru to enter the womb of his future mother. This woman is a courtesan from Lankapuri, the land of *rakshasas* or cannibal demons, who happens to have sexual intercourse three times during the day of his conception – with a white *deva* at dawn, with a red fire-demon at noon, and with a black *rakshasa* at night. As the offspring of these three fathers, Rudra is born eight months later as a black baby demon with six arms, four legs, two wings, and three terrifying triple-eyed faces that are white, black and red in colour. The agonizing experience of his mother giving birth is explicitly portrayed in part.

After nine days Rudra's mother dies, and her body and demonic child are carried to the charnel ground and abandoned beneath a poisonous tree. For six consecutive weeks Rudra consumes his dead mother's breast milk, her blood, her breasts, her entrails, her flesh, and her bones and marrow, by which time his body has fully matured. He then begins to consume the flesh of the corpses and animals that populate the charnel ground. He is depicted wearing the flayed skins of a human, tiger and elephant as his garments; writhing serpents as his limb, head and body ornaments; garlands of freshly severed heads, decaying heads and dry white skulls as his neck ornaments, and with the bulges of his forehead, cheeks and chin smeared respectively with cremation ash, fresh blood and human fat. Wielding deadly weapons in his three right hands and blood-filled skull-cups in his three left hands, Rudra's ferocious form thus became the prototype of many great wrathful and protective deities of the Vajrayana pantheon (pl. 8).

In this terrifying aspect Tharpa Nagpo ultimately manifests as Matam Rudra, the lord of all arrogant and malignant demons, whose abode is a skeletal palace made from glistening human bones and skulls. Eventually Rudra's ruthless dominion is overthrown by the enlightened incarnations of his own teacher and servant as Vajrasattva and Vajrapani. They assume the wrathful male and female forms of Avalokiteshvara and Tara as horse-headed Hayagriva and sow-headed Vajravahni. These two great Vajrayana Buddhist deities then subjugate Rudra and his demonic consort, Krodheshvari, by entering the apertures of their respective sexual organs, piercing and impaling the crowns of their heads, and finally casting them down. The sequential illustrations of this complex legend are depicted across the upper central area of this fresco.



## The Terma Tradition

The twenty-third fresco of the Pema Kathang series illustrates the many *termas* or 'hidden treasures' that Padmasambhava concealed throughout Tibet and the Himalayan regions. His main disciples would later discover these in their future incarnations as *tertons* or 'treasure finders'. Essentially these *termas* contain teachings that would be particularly beneficial in future times, when conditions for practicing the Dharma have changed, become degenerate, or a lineage of transmission has been broken or lost. A detail from this fresco shows Padmasambhava miraculously concealing some of these *termas* within caves, cliff faces and rock formations amidst the snow-capped landscape of Tibet (pl. 9). There are many different kinds of *termas*, but they frequently take the form of teachings written in an esoteric '*terma* script' on a yellow parchment or scroll, which is contained in a treasure-casket along with some sacred artifacts. In each representation Padmasambhava holds his *vajra* in his right hand, and often a treasure casket is shown in his left hand.

The twenty-sixth and last fresco of the Pema Kathang series illustrates Padmasambhava's departure from Tibet upon his magical blue horse, and his final teachings to the Tibetan people. A detail from this fresco shows his Tibetan consort, Yeshe Tsogyal (757–817), composing the text of the Pema Kathang, and then concealing it as a *terma* within the 'Crystal Cave' (*Tib.* shel-drak) after which this biography is named. In the lower right corner the great *terton* Orgyan Lingpa (1323 – c. 1360) is shown retrieving the treasure casket that contains this biographical *terma* in 1346, around six centuries after it was originally written and concealed.

The narrative iconography contained in both the twenty-six frescos on the 'Life of Padmasambhava', and the ten frescos that illustrate the 'Lives of the Eighty-four Mahasiddhas', displays a unique originality and innovative quality. Examples of this are revealed in the great diversity of fauna, flora and buildings, and the regional attires worn by the thousands of divine, human and demonic characters that populate the landscapes of these compositions. These beings are often shown in profile or from the rear, and much attention is given to the emotive sentiments or activities they convey. The imagery meticulously follows the continuing storylines of the narratives with a freedom of expression that is both explicit and exquisitely precise.

Another interesting feature of these frescos is that their imagery is purely didactic, their main purpose being to faithfully illustrate the legends they portray in the manner of a storybook or comic. In this respect they do not conform to the traditional Tibetan biographical model, in which the narrative events are secondary to the main central image of a religious figure or lineage holder. This lack of conformity

equally applies to the twenty-two intricate frescos on the Great Stupa's first floor shrine, which is dedicated to Shakyamuni Buddha. These paintings illustrate the text of a hundred and eight Jataka tales of the Buddha's previous lives. This text is known as the Avadana-Kalpalata, or 'Virtuous Stories of the Wish-granting Vine', which was compiled by the great Kashmiri scholar-king, Kshemendra, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

## **The Dharmapalas and Protector Deities**

The ten frescos of the Dharmapalas or Protectors contain about a hundred and thirty separate deities, which are all painted in sumptuous gold outline on a matt black background, with a minimal use of colour and wash shading. The technique of depicting wrathful deities in this manner follows a Tibetan tradition known as *nag-thang*, or 'black thangkas'. The lower areas of these compositions usually contain a lavish assembly of peaceful and wrathful offerings, depending upon whether the activity of the particular deity relates to pacifying, enriching, subjugating, or wrathful activity. A wealth deity, for example, may have many jewel and silk offerings; or a warrior deity may have an array of weapons and armor as offerings. The more wrathful deities have offerings associated with destruction, slaying and the charnel grounds, such as sacrificial cakes, wild animals, and skull-cups full of necromantic substances. These deities are surrounded with blazing masses of fire or billowing storm clouds, with sharp mountain peaks, oceans of blood, lightning or hail, and dreadful cemetery scenes appearing in their backgrounds. Many wrathful deities also have complex retinues, which may include their directional attendants, animal and bird messengers, warriors and spirit kings, tantric monks and magicians, and a host of male and female servants that are drawn from the 'eight classes of spirits'.

Once again the skill with which these powerful Dharmapalas are depicted reveals much of the innovative genius and compositional precision that characterize the painted frescos and architectural details of Mind-rolling's Great Stupa. Two examples of the gold on black Protector frescos are given here.

The first is a detail of the extremely fierce goddess Ekajati. Her form is distinguished by the unusual features of having only one breast, one sharp triangular tooth, one round bloodshot eye, a single braided 'hair-lock' (*Skt.* ekajata) that crowns the top of her head, and a poisonous mist that emanates from her upper and lower orifices. With her left hand she holds the blood-dripping heart of an enemy as she dispatches her 'iron-wolf messenger' with her raised and threatening index finger. With her right hand she wields aloft a corpse-club, which here is unusually shown as the flayed skin of an enemy that billows around the shaft of her club.

Her single breast that sags beneath her cloud-collar represents that 'she nourishes the dharma teachings like they were her only son', and to illustrate this her nectar-oozing nipple symbolically centers on the eight-spoke bone wheel or *dharmachakra* at her heart (pl. 10).

The second is an unusual representation of Rahu or Rahula, the 'wild planetary god of the skies', who causes eclipses of the sun and moon, and epileptic fits or apoplexy on whomever his terrible shadow falls. In this particular aspect he appears in the retinue of Four-faced Mahakala, at whom he gazes with his nine wrathful faces, all of which are depicted in a single-pointed focus and profile. The voracious mouth in Rahula's stomach, which is described as 'being capable of devouring the entire universe', is rarely depicted without its other facial features being present, as it is here. Another unique feature is that the coils of Rahula's serpentine lower body merge into the dragon-like body of the fierce crocodile or 'water-monster' (*Skt.* makara) that serves as his mount (pl. 11).

To conclude this presentation I would like to express my appreciation for all the sublime integrity and unique artistic vision that is enshrined in the five floors of wall paintings and sculpted imagery, which illuminates the interior of this Great Stupa like a cathedral of light. It is often said that the truly great works of Tibetan Art belong to the past, to a golden age that paradoxically seems to have ended on December 31<sup>st</sup> 1799, where evaluations determined by oriental connoisseurs and auction houses may be concerned. Yet as Pablo Picasso once wisely stated: "There is no such thing as ancient and modern art, there is only good art and bad art".

And from my perspective, after studying and practicing Tibetan art for more than forty years, I can truly say that the art produced by the many anonymous painters who decorated this Great Stupa are definitively 'good' in the purest sense of this word. These paintings will stand the test of time and are well deserving of their title, "Liberation through Seeing". For the visionary essences encapsulated in the 'Crystal Cave Chronicles' of Padmasambhava's biography have now been brought to life by the skilful contemporary Tibetan artists who have so recently painted them. In this respect they serve as modern *terma* revelation for our present time, and it is the wish of Khochhen Rinpoche, Gabriel Berde and myself that this material may soon be made available in published form.



6.

**Ступа Миндроллинг**  
XX в. Дехрадун, Индия

**Mindrolling Stupa**  
20th cent. Dehra Dun, India





7.

**Легенда о подчинении Рудры**  
Фреска. XX в.  
Ступа Миндроллинг в Дехрадуне, Индия

**The Subjugation of Rudra**  
Fresco. 20th cent.  
Mindrolling Stupa in Dehra Dun, India





8.

**Легенда о подчинении Рудры**  
Фреска. XX в.  
Ступа Миндроллинг в Дехрадуне, Индия

**The Subjugation of Rudra**  
Fresco. 20th cent.  
Mindrolling Stupa in Dehra Dun, India



9.

**Падмасамбхава, скрывающий термы  
внутри пещер**  
Фреска. XX в.  
Ступа Миндроллинг в Дехрадуне, Индия

**Padmasambhava concealing some  
of termas within caves**  
Fresco. 20th cent.  
Mindrolling Stupa in Dehra Dun, India





10.

Богиня Экаджати  
Фреска. XX в.  
Ступа Миндроллинг в Дехрадуне, Индия

Goddess Ekajati  
Fresco. 20th century.  
Mindrolling Stupa in Dehra Dun, India



11.

**Рахула**  
Фреска. XX в.  
Ступа Миндроллинг в Дехрадуне, Индия

**Rahula**  
Fresco. 20th cent.  
Mindrolling Stupa in Dehra Dun, India